

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

WILLIAM PAUL MILLER,

Civil No. 07-1 (DWF/AJB)

Petitioner,

v.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONS,

Respondent.

This matter is before the undersigned United States Magistrate Judge on Petitioner's application for habeas corpus relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The case has been referred to this Court for report and recommendation pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636 and Local Rule 72.1. For the reasons discussed below, the Court finds that Petitioner's habeas corpus petition is barred by the statute of limitations. The Court will therefore recommend that this action be summarily dismissed with prejudice pursuant to Rule 4 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts.¹

I. BACKGROUND

On January 31, 2005, Petitioner was convicted of various controlled substance offenses in the state district court for Fillmore County, Minnesota. He was sentenced to 129 months in prison, and he is currently serving his sentence at the Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton, Minnesota. (Petition, [Docket No. 1], p (2).)

¹ Rule 4 provides that "[i]f it plainly appears from the petition and any attached exhibits that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court, the judge must dismiss the petition and direct the clerk to notify the petitioner."

Petitioner did not file a direct appeal following his conviction and sentencing, and he has never filed any application for post-conviction relief in the Minnesota state courts. (Petition, p. (2), ¶s 8-10.) He candidly acknowledges, in fact, that his current federal habeas corpus petition is his first request for any judicial review of his conviction and sentence. (Petition, p. (6), ¶ 13.)

Petitioner's habeas corpus petition lists four claims for relief: (1) the evidence used against him was not "tested for meth residue;" (2) "fingerprinting was not done on the evidence;" (3) evidence favorable to Petitioner's defense was excluded as hearsay evidence; and (4) the prosecutor talked to a defense witness before trial, and used information obtained from that witness to help convict Petitioner. (Petition, pp. (5) - (6), ¶ 12.)

The Court finds, however, that Petitioner's habeas corpus petition was not filed within the one-year statute of limitations period prescribed by federal law. Therefore, the merits of Petitioner's claims will not be addressed, and the Court will recommend that this action be summarily dismissed.

II. DISCUSSION

On April 24, 1996, President Clinton signed the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act ("AEDPA"), which effected significant changes in the federal habeas corpus statutes. One of those changes appears at 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d), which establishes a one-year statute of limitations for habeas corpus petitions filed by state prisoners seeking federal court review of a conviction or sentence. This new statute provides that:

"(d)(1) A 1-year period of limitation shall apply to an application for a writ of

habeas corpus by a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court. The limitation period shall run from the latest of –

(A) the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review;

(B) the date on which the impediment to filing an application created by State action in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the applicant was prevented from filing by such State action;

(C) the date on which the constitutional right asserted was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if the right has been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or

(D) the date on which the factual predicate of the claim or claims presented could have been discovered through the exercise of due diligence.

(d)(2) The time during which a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending shall not be counted toward any period of limitation under this subsection.”

In this case, there is nothing on the face of the petition to suggest that clauses (B), (C) or (D) of § 2244(d)(1) could be applicable. In other words, there is no indication that the state created any impediment that prevented Petitioner from seeking federal habeas relief within the prescribed one-year limitation period; nor is there any indication that Petitioner’s claims are based on any newly-recognized and retroactively applicable constitutional right, or any new evidence that could not have been discovered soon enough to file a timely petition. Thus, the one-year statute of limitations began to run in this case, pursuant to § 2244(d)(1)(A), when Petitioner’s judgment of conviction “became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review.”

Petitioner is challenging a judgment entered against him on January 31, 2005.

(Petition, p. (2), ¶ 2.) Because he did not pursue a direct appeal, that judgment became final, for statute of limitation purposes, upon “the expiration of the time for seeking such review.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1)(A). According to the Minnesota Rules of Criminal Procedure, “[a]n appeal by a defendant shall be taken within 90 days after final judgment or entry of the order appealed from in felony and gross misdemeanor cases....” Rule 28.02, subd. 4(3). Thus, the deadline for seeking direct appellate review of Petitioner’s conviction and sentence was May 1, 2005 – 90 days after the judgment was entered. The deadline for seeking federal habeas corpus relief expired one year later, on May 1, 2006. Petitioner did not file his current petition, however, until January 3, 2007, which was more than eight months after the limitations period had expired. It is therefore readily apparent that the instant petition is time-barred, unless the statute of limitations was somehow tolled.

The tolling provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2) obviously cannot help Petitioner, because he has never applied for any post-conviction relief in the state courts. The Court has also considered whether the doctrine of “equitable tolling” could save this action from being time-barred. See Baker v. Norris, 321 F.3d 769, 771 (8th Cir.) (“the one year AEDPA time limit... may be equitably tolled”), cert. denied, 539 U.S. 918 (2003). However, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals has made it very clear that equitable tolling is available only “when extraordinary circumstances beyond a prisoner’s control make it impossible to file a [habeas corpus] petition on time... [or] when conduct of the defendant has lulled the plaintiff into inaction.” Jihad v. Hvass, 267 F.3d 803, 805 (8th Cir. 2001) (emphasis added). “[A]ny invocation of equity to relieve the strict application of a statute of limitations must be guarded and infrequent, lest circumstances of individualized hardship supplant the rules of clearly

drafted statutes.” Id. at 806, (quoting Harris v. Hutchinson, 209 F.3d 325, 330 (4th Cir. 2000)) (emphasis added).

Equitable tolling cannot be based on such commonplace and non-external excuses as prisoner ignorance or inadequate legal assistance. Kreutzer v. Bowersox, 231 F.3d 460, 463 (8th Cir. 2000), cert. denied, 534 U.S. 863 (2001). Instead, the petitioner must show that some specific and truly extraordinary event, of a wholly external nature, made it impossible for him to meet the statute of limitations deadline.

In this case, Petitioner has made no effort to show that any extraordinary and wholly external circumstances prevented him from seeking federal habeas corpus relief in a timely manner. He merely asserts that he “did not understand that [he] had the right to appeal or file for motion.” (Petition, p. (4), ¶ 11(d).) This clearly is not the type of excuse that can warrant equitable tolling. See id., (“in the case of an unrepresented prisoner alleging a lack of legal knowledge or legal resources, equitable tolling has not been warranted”).

III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons discussed above, the Court concludes that this action is time-barred by 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1). The Court will therefore recommend that this case be summarily dismissed pursuant to Rule 4 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts. Moreover, because Petitioner is no longer eligible for federal habeas corpus relief, it is further recommended that this action be dismissed with prejudice.²

² The Court notes that even if this action were not time-barred, it still would have to be summarily dismissed because of two other fatal flaws. First, Petitioner’s claims do not appear to be based on any alleged violation of his federal constitutional rights, as required by 28 U.S.C. § 2254(a). See Wainwright v. Goode, 464 U.S. 78, 83 (1983) (per curiam) (“[i]t is

Finally, because this action is time-barred, and must be summarily dismissed, the Court will also recommend that Petitioner's application to proceed in forma pauperis, (Docket No. 2), be summarily denied.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing, and all the files, records and proceedings herein,

IT IS HEREBY RECOMMENDED that:

1. Petitioner's application for a writ of habeas corpus, (Docket No. 1), be DENIED;
 2. Petitioner's application to proceed in forma pauperis, (Docket No. 2), be DENIED;
- and
3. This action be DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE.

Dated January 5, 2007

s/ Arthur J. Boylan
ARTHUR J. BOYLAN
United States Magistrate Judge

Pursuant to Local Rule 72.2(b), any party may object to this Report and Recommendation by filing with the Clerk of Court, and by serving upon all parties, written objections which specifically identify the portions of the Report to which objections are made and the bases for each objection. This Report and Recommendation does not constitute an order or judgment from the District Court and it is therefore not directly appealable to the Circuit Court of Appeals. Written objections must be filed with the Court before January 22, 2007.

axiomatic that federal courts may intervene in the state judicial process only to correct wrongs of a constitutional dimension"). Second, Petitioner did not present any of his current claims for relief to the Minnesota State Courts, before bringing them here, as required by 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b). See O'Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999) (a federal court will not entertain a petition for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a state prisoner unless the prisoner has first exhausted all available state court remedies for his federal constitutional claims).